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ERIC DOOLITTLE

1869-1920

By R. G. Aitken

Our sorrow over the death of a colleague or friend whose years have reached or exceeded the allotted three-score and ten is tempered by the reflection that he was given the opportunity to see the fulfilment of his plans for his life's work. In the case of Eric Doolittle, who died on September 21 of the present year, at the age of fifty-one, our sorrow has no such mitigation. Fruitful as his labors had been, we had every reason to expect that those of the coming decade or two would yield results of even greater value to astronomy, for it was known that he had in mind plans for a large program of work for whose execution he was specially fitted by his ability and experience. It is an irreparable loss that he was not permitted to live to carry out his plans.

Born on July 26, 1869, Eric Doolittle lived practically his entire life in the atmosphere of an astronomical observatory; for his father, the late Professor C. L. Doolittle, was appointed professor of astronomy and mathematics at Lehigh University in 1875, and held that post until 1895, when he became professor of astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Flower Observatory. Eric received the degree of Civil Engineer from Lehigh University in 1891 and after two years' experience as instructor in astronomy at that university and at the State University of Iowa, went to the University of Chicago for two years' graduate studies in astronomy. Here he proved his capacity as a student of theoretical astronomy and began the laborious researches which resulted in the publication, in 1912, of his memoir on *The Secular Variations of the Orbits of the Four Inner Planets.*

In 1896 he accepted the position of instructor in astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania and became his father's assistant at the newly founded Flower Observatory, taking full charge of the work with the excellent 18-inch refracting telescope. In 1912 he succeeded his father as director of this observatory and as professor of astronomy in the university, the position he held at the time of his death.

Eric Doolittle possessed unusual working powers. He carried a full schedule of work as a teacher in the university—a working program which would satisfy the average man—and in addition to this his record as an observer is one with which a man giving his entire time to observatory work might well be content. Finding the 18-inch telescope and the atmospheric conditions at the Flower Observatory well adapted to micrometric work, he took up the study and measurement of double stars and soon made himself an authority in this field of research.

In 1901 he published his first volume—*Measures of 900 Double and Multiple Stars*. This was followed in 1905 by his *Measures of 1066 Double and Multiple Stars;* in 1907 by his *Catalogue and Remeasurement of the 648 Hough Double Stars;* and in 1914 by his *Measures of 1954 Double Stars*. The thousands of measures accumulated since 1914 and still unpublished will fill at least one more large volume.

Doolittle's work thruout was characterized by its attention to details and its great accuracy, and it was these qualities, as well as his great knowledge of the subject, that led Professor Burnham of the Yerkes Observatory to turn over to him, on his retirement in 1913, the data he had himself accumulated for the extension of his General Catalogue of Double Stars (known as *Burnham's* or *β's G. C.*) with the request that he carry the work to completion. Professor Doolittle accepted this additional responsibility and entered upon the work with his accustomed quiet enthusiasm. His collection of all published observations was so complete and kept so well up to date and was so fully supplemented by his own measures that in recent years he was the authority to whom astronomers all over the world appealed for information concerning any double star in the northern sky.

Notwithstanding all these professional labors, he found time to contribute many popular articles to the newspapers of Philadelphia and to other journals and to take his full share of the ordinary duties of life in a university community. A man of attractive personality, distinguished particularly by his kindly disposition and the genuineness of his nature, he had a wide circle of friends. Never a very strong man physically, his health was seriously impaired some time ago by an attack of influenza. Heart disease developed and since June 24 he had been confined to the university hospital.

In 1902 Eric Doolittle was married to Sara Bitler Halliwell, of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Mrs. Doolittle and a brother, Alfred Doolittle, professor of astronomy at the Catholic University of Washington, D. C., survive him. Memorial services in his honor were held at the University of Pennsylvania on Friday evening, November 12, addresses being made by Dr. Frank Schlesinger, president of the American Astronomical Society, Provost Edgar F. Smith, of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Rev. Robert Norwood, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, with which Professor Doolittle was connected.

OBITUARY NOTICE OF JOHN NELSON STOCKWELL OF CLEVELAND, OHIO

By T. J. J. See

In the death of Professor John Nelson Stockwell of Cleveland, Ohio, May 18, 1920, in the 89th year of his age, America has lost one of her foremost philosophers and the dean of the group of eminent astronomers which originally included Gould, Hall, Newcomb, and Hill. Dr. Stockwell was born on a farm near Northampton, Mass., April 10, 1832, but his parents—William Stockwell III, and Clarissa Whittemore Stockwell, who had been married May 19, 1826—with their five children, moved to Ohio in the autumn of 1833. The future astronomer was the youngest of these children, and was of frail constitution till his fourteenth year, after which he became robust. As his parents were poor, he grew up after his eighth year, with his uncle, Oliver Edgerton, at Brecksville, near Cleveland, Ohio, with which city he was always associated.

Stockwell's early educational opportunities were limited by the undeveloped state of the schools of Ohio, so recently carved out of the great Northwest Territory. But by good fortune common school books fell into his hands, and at twelve years of age his intellectual interest began to assert itself. From the study of arithmetic he passed to algebra, geometry and astronomy. By the accounts given in popular treatises on astronomy, he was led to acquire in 1852 Bowditch's translation of Laplace's *Mécanique Céleste*, which fixed his career in mathematical astronomical research. It will be remembered that Dr. Bowditch had published this great work in 1838-9 at an enormous personal sacrifice, but it was likewise of the greatest inspiration to such astronomers as Hall, Newcomb and Hill. Thus for nearly a century it fixed the careers of the leading American astronomers; and in 1840 Bowditch's edition of Laplace influenced the French Chamber of Deputies to republish the chief works of Laplace, when Madame Laplace was